

Linda Clair
Four-and-a-half-day Meditation Retreat
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File 5c – Sunday afternoon discussion

Question: I have a question about my face. I can sit with a lot of physical pain and stay pretty steady and you wouldn't know it from the look on my face. But then a different kind of intensity will come up and my face will slowly tighten up, my eyes especially. Then I force my face to come back to normal against the tension in those muscles. But in a few seconds it will be like that again, and go through several cycles of that before it will calm back down. Is that reaction significant?

Linda: It's just that you're feeling tension. I used to feel that too. I'd feel tightness a lot in my jaw, I'd realise I was holding my jaw. So just do what you're doing it, look at it. As soon as you realise you're doing it, it usually softens a bit. So just do that. It's just that you're feeling a lot of tension and you're expressing it with your face.

Question: What's happened the last couple of times is just before the bell goes is when I feel really peaceful. Is that the part to sit with?

Linda: Not necessarily. Sit with the whole thing. Feeling that peace is the result of rest of the sitting. Every bit of the sit is valuable. There's not really any part that's more valuable than any other. When you feel like that, of course it's nice and you tend to go, "This is how I want to feel, this is how it *should* be," and then that makes you judge the rest of the sit as a waste of time, or that you're not doing it properly, but it's not true. So I'd say, don't place any more importance on any part of the sitting.

When you're sitting at home, change the times around a bit because that can start to happen. If you're sitting for exactly an hour every day, habitual things will creep in. You'll subtly start to expect that to happen and that's will happen and you'll go, "Oh, it's just at the end of the sit that I feel that." So it will always be just at the end of the sit. If you change it around, you don't get into so much of a habitual sequence of events during your sitting – "Oh it takes me a while to settle in and then this happens and then that happens." So sometimes sit for a shorter period and sometimes for a longer period. It's good to change it around. But set a timer and sit until the bell goes.

We can tend to go, "Oh, when I'm feeling like this, I'm meditating," but you're meditating the whole time. You just don't see the value in it because you can be stirred up and it's difficult. But the fact that you keep sitting when it isn't so pleasant is really the main thing, not so much that state that you feel. It's very pleasant of course.

Question: As time goes on and you practice more, do you get more of the pleasant part? (Laughter)

Linda: Not necessarily. You sort of do, you become stiller. But as you become stiller the mind becomes more persistent and you see it more clearly so it can appear at times like you've actually gone backwards and you're not feeling so great. When people first start sitting they have a bit of a

honeymoon period where it's all amazing and great, and then it starts to change because the deeper stuff comes up.

But those periods sort of do come and you notice it more in your everyday life, maybe more than sitting, just a general deeper sense of presence and being here, being in your body. It might not always be comfortable but you do feel more real and more alive. So those periods – not necessarily – they might or might not. You'll get more periods like that but it doesn't follow, "This time I had five minutes of it, next time I get six." It's not like that. That's the hard bit because you tend to feel, "If I keep practicing I should feel better and better and that's what should happen."

Question: So that's not the goal.

Linda: No, that's not the goal.

Question: Do you think that during the day it's good too, moments during the day, not meditating formally but having that presence throughout the day?

Linda: Yes, of course, as much as you can. I would say some periods of formal mediation are really important but then the rest of the time, don't separate it into, "Oh yes, this is when I'm meditating and the rest of the time I can do whatever." If you do have those periods of formal sitting it will make it more natural and desirable to be more present the rest of the time, because you'll start to notice how often you're not in your body or just present – how often you're thinking. Then you start to tolerate that less and less. Until in the end, you just can't stand it.

So I'd say notice during the day, particularly times when it's obvious, notice when you don't need to be thinking, like having a shower, eating your dinner, basic things like that. We do tend to think we have to be thinking and it's difficult to trust that you don't have to be thinking. So periods where you're doing very basic things, where obviously you don't need to be thinking – but then notice that you are. And use little tricks. I used to hang the washing out on the line and count the pegs, or go for a walk and count my steps sometimes, and just breathe into my belly at times and things like that. Any little tricks that bring you back into your body are good.

It will make it more intense if you do that. But you will also often get very tired, or more tired than usual, when you start doing that more frequently during the day. I used to, every day I could, I would have some sort of nap. It only needs to be a micro nap or just to rest where you're not doing anything like reading or watching TV – just lying there – maybe not with the aim of going to sleep but you might just have a little, slight sleep and that will help you get through the rest of the day.

Question: This morning I knew it was my last chance to do a long sit. Towards the end I had a lot of pain in my foot, especially in one toe. It felt like someone was burning it so it was really intense but I didn't want to stop sitting. So I put my head down on my cushion for ten seconds and then went back up. And then again a few minutes after that. So I was able to finish my aim this morning. Is that okay? The pain continued being there. It was mildly lower for a few seconds then it went back to my foot again. Is that okay, having little break, or should I stop the meditation?

Linda: No, it's probably better to have that little break rather than stop. You're probably pretty tired now because you've been sitting quite a bit over the last week. So yes, that's fine. But just watch that it doesn't become a habitual behaviour because it's easy to slip into something like that where you know if

you bend down you will have a little break. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that but then where is the point where you do that? What is the point of the pain threshold and having a break? And it will release a bit of energy, so just watch that. But yes, it's fine, particularly when you're really tired. But just be careful you don't do it every five minutes or so. That can happen, there can be the feeling, "Oh yes, if I just do this, I'll have a bit of a break." So I'd say, do it occasionally but just watch anything that becomes really habitual.

Question: In the past I found little things like tricks to take the pressure off – even stopping the sit. For example, if I set the timer for two and a half hours or one hour and I feel quite a lot of pain, sometimes I stop the meditation and that has gotten into a habit.

Linda: So I would say, make the period a bit shorter. It's better to gauge it a little bit on how tired you are, although if you do that all the time, you're going to say, "Oh, I don't feel like it today." But it's better to sit for forty minutes without moving than an hour and a half moving around or stopping it. So don't feel that the longer you sit, the better. And be a bit realistic about it and change it around. And don't see a shorter period as being less valuable.

It's great that you've been sitting through during this retreat but then particularly this next week be a little bit easier on yourself. It's better to make it a little bit shorter and stick to that time than make it too long and it's just not manageable. It depends also on the degree of pain. When there's a lot of pain you just can't sit for two and a half hours, it's too much. An hour is probably much more reasonable than two and a half hours. But you never know when you're going to feel that pain. It can just suddenly pop up. So experiment a bit.

Question: Did you ever finish a retreat and leave feeling really bad?

Linda: Yes. Do you feel really bad?

Question: I feel really bad. I've felt worse. (Laughter.)

Linda: So yes, I have, and at times, very emotional. The emotion will settle down. It might take a few days but it will settle down. But it does happen because it's stirring up all this stuff. There's this feeling, "I should be feeling great after a meditation retreat," but not necessarily so. (Laughter)

If so much stuff has been stirred up, eventually you will feel lighter but I can't say how long it might take. But just try and deal with it and gradually, gradually it will lift. Things have to get stirred up before they clear out. It's hard when you feel crap after a retreat but it does happen, probably quite a bit.

It doesn't mean next time you're going to feel the same. Next time you might feel high as a kite. But you just don't know. You don't feel suicidal do you?

Question: Do I look suicidal? (Laughter) Why are you asking?

Linda: It's not that you look really depressed. This is different to depression. It's just intense emotion being stirred up.

Question: I was beating myself up quite a bit because I don't talk a lot and I don't know why; questions just don't come to my mind.

Linda: That doesn't matter. Often during retreats there are a few people who hardly ever say anything. It doesn't mean anything in particular. Especially in a group like this, often your question gets answered by other people. So don't worry about that. It doesn't matter.

Question: Does meditating in a group meditating tend to be more intense than when you're by yourself?

Linda: Yes, it does. Intense and also you feel more supported usually, less isolated. I think it's good to sit by yourself as well. But yes, it can intensify it and also ground you more as well.

Question: So it's definitely recommended to not just do it yourself at home?

Linda: Not all the time. Do it yourself at home too, but not all the time. And not for really long periods by yourself, for most people, I'd say.

Question: There's a phrase in the *Course in Miracles* that keeps coming to mind – Jesus said something like, "I and my father are one. The difference between you and me is (?)"

Linda: Do you mean me and you?

Question: No, his words. The difference between whoever it was he was talking to was that his entire framework was the father whereas for the other person it was the father and all the extra stuff. The reason that feels relevant to me is that after our last conversation I suddenly saw that with the clarity about grounding myself and feeling the sense of energy which is diffused, I saw that the knowing knows itself and doesn't need anything else to support it. It's completely whole and full and has everything it needs. The thinking is a fear-based story hopping in there to control and manipulate and add stuff to it. I got excited about seeing that because everything I am is the self-contained totality, I saw by seeing the thinking and seeing the fear that the thinking is the whole time.

Linda: I'm pretty sure I know what you mean. What you just need to keep doing is seeing that – not doing anything with it – just seeing, just watching. Self-supporting but connected with everything.

Question: Yes, because there were a couple of realisations in there. One was, there's nothing going on at all. The only thing going on is just an idea or concept. But other than that there's nothing actually going on. And also, that there is no other. I'm so grateful to have been here and be part of this, and for your direction and guidance. Thank you.

Question: Apropos of that point, there's a lot that led up to what I'm about to say but what started happening yesterday is that I suddenly gave up trying to decide whether to get up and walk or sit through the tea-break. Instead I would just be in my breath and in my body and when the bell rings, just look or something and it's always crystal clear, stay or get up. There's no right or wrong and no way for me to know but it's a lot better and peaceful and I feel more locked into my breath. It's in charge and it's much better.

Linda: Yes. Good.

